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SEC BRIEFING 23 September 1975

SOVIET APPROACHES IN MIDDLE EAST

- I. USSR in "Geneva spirit", adroitly pushing year-old neutrality campaign in troubled Middle East.
 - A. In guise of peaceful merchants, Communists are displaying attractive wares to have-not nations of area -- trade, technical assistance and guns -- without visible political strings attached.
 - B. Immediate purpose: block extension, strengthening of area's Western-sponsored defense structure by exploiting local dissensions (Israeli-Arab troubles, Turkish-Iraqi pact, Afghan-Pakistani dispute). Efforts focussed on forcing withdrawal of U.S. bases, coaxing development of neutralism.
 - C. In longer view, we can see outlines of an even grander and more patient Soviet program -- elimination of all Western economic, political influence in Middle East, opening of area to Communist influence and eventual control.
- II. USSR's "relaxation" policy already weakening anti-Soviet foreign policies in many Middle East countries.
 - A. Soviet neutrality theme, ("can't get hurt off the playing field") appears more plausible than Western tune of "collective defense".
 - B. Soviet overtures genuinely attractive: interest on loans as low as 2 and 2 1/2 percent; barter arrangements for area chronically short in hard currency.

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- C. Overtures also give local politicians chance to pressure West for aid

III. Communists' most persistent and spectacular overtures are aimed at Egypt and Saudi Arabia, with Syria a fair third.

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- A. Egyptian military mission to Moscow has made deal exchanging cotton and rice for tanks, jet fighters and bombers.

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IV. If Egyptian-Soviet arms deal is fully implemented, Egypt would gain marked superiority over Israel in aircraft and tanks.

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- B. G-2 credits Egypt with 189 medium tanks, not including recent deliveries to Alexandria of some 120 UK-built Wd II "Valentines". USSR, according to agreement, is to deliver 100 heavy tanks.

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- C. In terms actual military capabilities, however, effect of purchases would be uncertain. Egyptians are keeping present small air force operational only with difficulty and would certainly find it hard to absorb and put to effective use 200 more planes. To a lesser extent, added tanks would present similar problems.

- D. Further, the present Egyptian lack of competent military personnel in all ranks means that an intensive training effort - maintained for a period of years - would be needed.

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- V. Soviets have also made deal with Egypt which will jump 1955 petroleum sales to three times last year's level (from 273,000 to over 850,000 tons).

- A. Also urging Egyptians to accept Soviet aid on projected "high dam".
- B. Egypt also bartering cotton for Chi Com steel reinforcing rods.
- C. Egyptian government states Chou En-lai will pay visit before end of '55, to renew Sino-Egypt contacts with Nasr. Nasr is to visit USSR next spring.

- VI. Both Egyptians and Saudis allegedly told that Moscow is interested in entering into security guarantees with them and other Middle Eastern states.

- A. Such offers forecast by Bulganin's Geneva statement that USSR prepared, together with other powers, to guarantee neutrality of any country so desiring.
- B. Offers especially attractive to Arab States because they spell guarantee against Israel.
- C. In case of Saudi Arabia, such guarantee would automatically mean end to US Dhahran air base agreement.

B. However, Saudis' frustration over general Middle East developments (Iraqi-Turkish pact, Israel, and its own territorial disputes) has reached peak where top Saudi officials -- including Prime Minister Faisal and Defense Minister Mishael -- have already all but declared an intent to cancel Dhahran agreement.

1. Notice of intent to modify or cancel must be given this Dec.

VII. Tacit Soviet support for Arab claims against Israel is another related gimmick.

- A. In June, Investia made most specific Soviet press attack on Israel for two years: Since then, Soviet news items slanted against Israel.
- B. Israel views any military strengthening of Arabs as threatening to its very existence.
- C. Israel can be expected to make maxims representations to US, Britain and France, demanding new guarantees, arms.

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B. Thus, USSR's immediate tactics appear as a "black twin" to current US objectives in area:

1. US aim -- Arab-Israeli settlement: Soviet arms deals, in particular, will raise tensions here.
2. US aim -- Northern Tier: cheap and plentiful Soviet arms for Egypt will invite invidious comparison with handful of US hardware for Tier member Iraq.

VIII. USSR's efforts build economic contacts with Afghanistan received a boost when Pakistan closed frontier during recent rupture. Kabul soon signed transit agreement with Moscow.

- A. Most recently, Soviet bloc has offered Afghanistan a medical mission and medical equipment, as well as materials, equipment and technicians for installing water systems in Kabul and Kandahar.

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- C. Bloc aid to Afghanistan has certainly encouraged that country to take obdurate attitude in its basic dispute with Pakistan.

IX. Iran being pressured by USSR to prevent it from joining Turkish-Iraqi pact.

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- C. But here, also, Soviets are holding out bait of a guaranteed neutrality. Shah has been invited to Moscow, probably will go in early 56. Elaborate Soviet offers friendship, aid can be expected.
- D. Iran is interested but hesitant about Turkish-Iraqi pact and strong Soviet efforts could keep Iran neutral. Shah's several years' drive for massive American aid has not brought what he wants, and he may soon be willing listen to Moscow.